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A

SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF

TRINITY IN THE MINORIES,

ON FEBRUARY 28, 1794;

BEING THE DAY APPOINTED FOR

A PUBLIC FAST.

BY HENRY FLY, M.A. F.R.S.

MINISTER OF THE SAID PARISH.

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1794.

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TO

THE WORTHY PARISHIONERS OF

TRINITY,

IN THE MINORIES;

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE

IS INSCRIBED,

BY THEIR OBLIGED,

AND AFFECTIONATE

MINISTER,

HENRY FLY.

A

SERMON, &c.

ISAIAH V. 4.

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE MORE TO MY VINEYARD THAT I HAVE NOT DONE IN IT? WHEREFORE WHEN I LOOKED THAT IT SHOULD BRING FORTH GRAPES, BROUGHT IT FORTH WILD GRAPES?

THE Prophet in this chapter enumerates the manifold bleſſings conferred on his countrymen, the ill returns they had made to their divine benefactor, and the dreadful calamities which, if not pre-

vented by repentance, were likely on that account within the period of a few years to befall them. Theſe circumſtances he deſcribes after the eaſtern manner, in a beautiful allegory or parable; the ſeveral parts of which, with the points of inſtruction they reſpectively afford, might be a profitable ſubject of diſcuſſion would the time permit. The uſe we ſhall make of it at preſent, will be to apply the pathetic interrogation of the text to ourſelves, as a people, that, reſembling the Jews of old in the multitude of our advantages, and too much in our ingratitude to God, we may by a timely humiliation and amendment, avert the awful effects of his juſt diſpleaſure.

Like Judea, this favoured country may be fitly deſcribed under the emblem of a vineyard, an encloſed ſpot, the peculiar care of the huſbandman. Fertile by nature, it affords whatever is abſolutely needful for the ſupport and comfort of its inhabitants. The natural produce of its fields, its paſtures and its mines, being at once of the

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firſt importance to life, and ſuperior in their kind to thoſe articles in other climates: its tame and uſeful animals of the beſt quality: by a moſt extenſive and lucrative commerce, it acquires the commodities of every country, and concentrates in its metropolis the riches of the globe: and while our wants are encreaſed by refinement and imagination, they are ſupplied and even prevented. Nor is this the caſe with the metropolis only. The ſpirit of commerce being that of the greater part of the kingdom, its opulence is of courſe general, and from this ſource alone, villages, within the memory of man, of inconſiderable ſize, have become populous towns, encreaſing every day in extent and conſequence; while that part of our land devoted to agriculture, hath equally ſhared the bleſſing of heaven in a ſucceſſion of fruitful ſeaſons, filling our hearts with food and gladneſs. We have ſeen of late years, more eſpecially, the vallies ſtand thick with corn and the fields laugh and ſing.

Such are the bleſſings we enjoy, ſecured to us by our ſituation as iſlanders, and the excellency of our political conſtitution. Girt with the ſea, we need no bulwarks, comparatively ſpeaking, but thoſe floating ones which keep at a diſtance the miſeries of war: while other countries feel them within their own boſom, by turns, the prey of contending parties, alike injured by friends and foes, we know them but by deſcription. No armies trample down the produce of the ground, ruin our citizens by enormous contributions, burn our villages, or inſult and oppreſs thoſe they are employed to defend. But while the flames of war are ſpreading far and wide on the neighbouring continent, the Briton ſits and decides on the merits of the quarrel, under his own vine and under his own fig-tree.

Nor hath Providence been leſs careful to preſerve us from internal oppreſſion. Born under a government the beſt planned

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in the known world, we enjoy in the utmoſt poſſible degree, that ſweetener of every condition, liberty: a form of government by which, as a limited monarchy, the inceſſant factions and tardy deliberations of a republic are avoided, as well as the too common abuſes of unlimited power; in which an order of nobility forms a barrier between the ſovereign and the people, capable by their weight in the political balance, to prevent the one from preponderating to the diſadvantage of the other: and whoſe privileges act as a powerful ſtimulus, to call forth, for the public good, the talents and exertions of thoſe whoſe ſpirit and opulence raiſe them above other conſiderations—a conſtitution in which the firſt honours of the country are acceſſible to all. And not only the opportunities of acquiring property are infinitely various, but the poſſeſſion of it is ſecure—in which the laws are paramount to all other authority, the judges independent, and no man puniſhable but by the verdict of his equals. In ſhort, a plan of government, which one

of the firſt ſtateſmen of antiquity *, thought would be the moſt perfect if practicable, a bleſſing to be rather wiſhed for than expected. In which, if, as in every thing human, there ſhould be found ſome defects remaining, or ſome damage imperceptibly incurred, there are alſo contained and pointed out the means of repair.—A conſtitution too near perfection, to be raſhly endangered under the pretence of reforming it; and which may ſurely be improved if neceſſary by the wiſdom of the country without the interference of a foreign power.

To all this it becomes us to add, as though laſt yet not leaſt to be conſidered, our ſtill more valuable privileges as Chriſtians and Proteſtants. Very ſoon after the riſing of

* Tacit. Ann. lib. iv. c. 33. Nam cunctas nationes et urbes, populus, aut primores, aut ſinguli regunt. Delecta ex his et conſociata reipub. forma laudari facilius quam evenire poteſt. See alſo the admirable reflections of Polybius on this ſubject, book vi.

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the ſun of righteouſneſs, did his genial rays ſhine on this remote corner of the earth. And when they were again obſcured by the miſts of error, and the truth almoſt loſt in a chaos of human traditions, this was one of the firſt of thoſe few countries, to which, by a merciful Providence, it was again reſtored. You, my friends of the capital, enjoy a peculiar abundance of the means of grace, and improvement, opportunities to us cheap, but purchaſed with the blood of many holy men between two and three centuries ago; and more particularly we of the eſtabliſhment, poſſeſs an eccleſiaſtical polity formed on the beſt models of the primitive ages, a form of ſound doctrine, a liturgy truly evangelical, plain, pathetic, rational, ſublime, calculated at once to inform the underſtanding, and excite the affections; by which even the moſt illiterate are taught what is the will of God concerning them, and how to aſk thoſe things that are needful as well for the body as for the ſoul.

May not God juſtly ſay of us as of his ancient people, what could have been done more for my vineyard that I have not done? When the plant is lodged in ſo fair a ſoil, may he not juſtly come and ſeek fruit thereon? yes, and in proportion to the culture beſtowed. Where much is given much will be required. What then can he expect from this nation, but a prevailing fear and love of his holy name, a zeal for his honour, a veneration for his ordinances, purity of morals, integrity in our dealings, and more particularly a moſt lively and grateful ſenſe of his diſtinguiſhing goodneſs to us? And is this the caſe, or may we not add with the Prophet, he looked that it ſhould bring forth grapes, and it brouht forth wild grapes?

Innumerable as our privileges are, a ſpirit of murmuring and diſcontent hath gone forth, and while foreigners view with envy the fabric of the Britiſh conſtitution, there are perſons who, ſheltered by it, would fain pull it down. Men who after diſ-

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guiſing their ſentiments under the pretext of oppoſing only particular meaſures, have now taken off the maſk, and avow their antipathy to the conſtitution itſelf. Startled as we may at firſt be at the face of treachery, it is I preſume ſo far a happy circumſtance, as an open enemy is preferable to a falſe friend. They are now better known and more eaſily looked after. Such perſons there are in every age, and under every government, who purchaſed by its enemies, from the rage of diſappointment, from perſonal pique againſt the rulers, from the hopes of plunder, and of riſing into power and diſtinction; or who from the love of change which induces a reſtleſs ſpirit to prefer any condition to that in which it hath for ſome time exiſted, conſpire as they have opportunity to throw all things into confuſion, and to anſwer their private ends at the expence of the public tranquillity.

Others indeed who are influenced by purer motives, more attentive to the name of liberty, than to the thing itſelf, become enamoured

enamoured of ſome theory of government not reducible to practice; not ſuited to the actual ſtate of human nature, and which conſequently can never be permanent. They are not well apprized of the true limits of civil liberty, that in it we reſign a part of our natural freedom to preſerve the reſt; that on this principle is all government founded; that liberty hath as much to fear from unreſtrained licentiouſneſs as from arbitrary power. They are hence led to run the deſperate hazard of trying political ſchemes, unſanctioned by experience, and riſque the bleſſings they poſſeſs, for others which can never be attained or ſecured.

They are not unfrequently miſled by the doctrines of perſonal repreſentation, as if he who poſſeſſed nothing in the country, ſhould be equally entitled to a ſhare in its government with him whoſe ſtake is ever ſo large. The poor and labouring part of the community, are amuſed with ideas of an equality of rights, and while to others it is pretended, that only an

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equal claim to the protection of the laws is meant (a right amply ſecured to every claſs amongſt us) the incendiary leads his uninformed and unthinking diſciples to expect, upon his levelling plan, an equal participation of property and conſequence. An equality which cannot in the nature of things continue, ſince, if it were once eſtabliſhed, the different talents and diſpoſitions of men, would ſoon revive the various diſtinctions of rank and opulence.

The diſaffected amongſt us pretend ſometimes to be numerous; a uſual manœuvre to intimidate the public, and to gain ſtrength. The pretended democracy of France has been repreſented as founded on the general wiſhes of the people; and yet, the very faction which now prevails, and has profeſſedly endeavoured to embroil every part of Europe, acknowledge in a printed document *, diſperſed by their own order, that

* Hiſtory of the Briſſotines by Camille-Des Moulins, deputy of Paris in the National Convention, printed

that at the beginning of the revolution, their number ſcarcely exceeded ten. That they acquired power by joining others who deſired not to go ſo far; and glory in having deſtroyed the old ſyſtem, by means of

printed by order of the Jacobin Club, p. 11. and 12. "It was thus that we were enabled to give battle to the veterans, who deſerted us by the new levy of intriguers that flocked to the Jacobin ſtandard: it was by theſe means that the Chapeliers, the Dumetz, and the Deſmeaniers, were driven from the club by the Barnaves and Duports; and the Barnaves and Duports, by the Briſſots and the Rolands. It was thus that we vanquiſhed the pure and unqualified deſpotiſm of Calonne, by the two legiſlative houſes of Neckar; and the two legiſlative houſes of Neckar, by the two legiſlative ſections of Briſſot, Petion, and Buzot; and the active citizens of Syeſes and Condorcet, by what we at laſt arrived at, the Sans Culottes. It was thus that we ſucceſſively vanquiſhed Maury the royaliſt, by Mounier and his two houſes; Mounier and his two houſes, by Mirabeau, with his abſolute negative; and Mirabeau's abſolute negative, by Barnave's ſuſpenſive Veto; and Barnave and his ſuſpenſive Veto, by Briſſot, who choſe to have no other negative than that of himſelf and his friends. All theſe rogues, ſwept by each other from the Jacobins, have at laſt made room for Danton, Robeſpierre, and Lindet, for thoſe general deputies of every department, Mountaineers of the Convention, &c. &c."

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the advocates for a limited monarchy; theſe by the republican party at large, and their republican allies, who were at length for putting a ſtop to the effuſion of human blood, by their grand engine the mob. Thus a rage for innovation leads to anarchy, and that terminates in the tyranny a few, or of one man, who under of the guiſe of patriotic zeal, puts to death a mild and benevolent prince, and by the help of numberleſs maſſacres and executions, governs the nation with an abſolute ſway.

Such wild and deſtructive ſentiments can never become general in this country, without a degree of inattention to its political advantages from which we are, with all our levity, I truſt, far removed. Much leſs would I be ſuppoſed to imagine, that they have gained footing in this audience, but would from the occaſion of this day's ſolemnity, call upon you, by every legal method, to ſtop their progreſs, to inſpire all on whom you have any influence, with a love of peace and order, to

make them acquainted with the happineſs they enjoy, to guard them againſt the artful inſinuations of deſigning men, and to beg of God to turn the hearts, or to confound the devices of the deluded party.

We have, I fear, more general cauſe for humiliation in the prevalence of luxury and diſſipation, of ſenſuality and exceſs, of calumny and falſhood, of ſabbath-breaking and indifference to the concerns of the ſoul. Connected in ſome meaſure with every part of the habitable world, there is ſcarcely a vice, or a folly of other nations, which we have not imported. Among the higher claſſes of ſociety, an encreaſing variety of pleaſurable purſuits engroſs the attention. Pleaſures ridiculous in themſelves, and of the moſt pernicious tendency; for every ſeaſon of the year, and for every part of the day and night, a round of buſy idleneſs; calculated to enfeeble and debauch the mind, to exclude reflection, to leave no room for buſineſs or improvement, to baniſh all thoughts

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of an approaching eternity; and though amid the allurements of high life, we have many illuſtrious examples of active uſefulneſs and benevolence, ſome patterns of piety to God and of every moral virtue, yet are the deſire of the fleſh, the deſire of the eye, and the pride of life, too apt to predominate where the means of gratification are ſo ample and ſo obvious. And this ſhould render us leſs anxious to obtain wealth or power, and reſigned under the loſs of them.

The middle ranks of life are generally the moſt virtuous, not expoſed to the ſnares of either riches or poverty. Yet even theſe we ſee often vying with their ſuperiors in gaiety and extravagance. Aiming to cut a figure in the eye of the world, rather than by aſſiduity in buſineſs, to provide things honeſt for themſelves and their houſholds. They had rather appear happy than be ſo. The management of trade is left to a ſubſtitute, who has no natural obligation to be ſolicitous for its ſucceſs; the family neglected for viſiting and dreſs;

parental

parental duties are counted mean and degrading; The nurture and admonition of the Lord yields to the enervating modes of faſhionable education. Hence the trifling turn of the youth of both ſexes, and the looſe morals of domeſtics. They periſh for lack of knowledge. From ignorance, pride and indolence, our houſes are violated, and our public ways impeded, by rapine and proſtitution.

Such are the effects of diſſipation in the inferiors of a family, and no leſs miſchievous are thoſe it produces in the head of it. Not reconciled to the ſlow methods of acquiring a competency by perſevering induſtry, he purſues it more rapidly in ſpeculation and gaming. If theſe fail, he hath recourſe to fraud. I need not obſerve how much the arts of chicanery have encreaſed in the buſy world, within a few years paſt. Happily an exalted character in the legal department, hath ſet himſelf to check the growing evil. Hath not its encreaſe been in proportion to that of the love of pleaſure? It is reaſonable to ſup-

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poſe it hath. For while the reſources of induſtry are cut off to the man of pleaſure, his wants are enhanced a thouſand fold. The demands of caprice and ſenſuality are inſatiable; indirect means are therefore called in to ſupply them. The end of theſe is ſooner or later infamy, too often death, ſometimes inflicted by the hands of public juſtice, ſometimes by his own.

All this is but a ſketch of the national corruptions, to complete which the time would fail, and which you, my friends, who are converſant with the world, can very well fill up. Yet, I muſt add, the diſcouraging caſe of many who are free from the groſſer vices of the times, ſufficiently attentive to their intereſt in this life, but who lay not up treaſure in heaven; who ſeek the kingdom of God in the ſecond place only, but wiſh to provide firſt for the body. Who are wiſe in their generation as children of this world, but far from being children of light; diligent in buſineſs, but not ſerving the Lord. How many carry their worldly cares and employ-

ments far into that day, which God hath claimed for his own, and commanded them to keep holy! How many loſe in pleaſureable excurſions, or in ſloth and idleneſs, on the ſabbath, the only opportunities they perhaps can enjoy, of conſulting the oracles of God! Not to mention the comparatively few who come regularly to the Lord's table, the families in which, however decent in other reſpects, there are no traces of the worſhip of God, and the many more who, it is to be feared, hardly ever pour out their ſouls before him in ſecret devotion. When we conſider theſe marks of lukewarmneſs, we cannot but diſcern an alarming reſemblance between the ſtate of our church and that of Laodicea.† If we conſider too the numerous and flouriſhing ſocieties which, from the latter end of the laſt century, till within the memory of ſome now alive, met within its pale, ſubject to its regulations, to provoke one another to love and to good works *, but are now dwindled to no-

† Rev. iii. 15

* See Woodward's account of the religious ſocieties.

thing, we may too juſtly exclaim with the prophet, " How is the gold become dim, " how is the moſt fine gold changed !"

If we look into the religious world, the ſymptoms are ſtill unfavourable; on the one hand are formality and ſelf-confidence; an attendance on divine inſtitutions, rather as a taſk than a privilege; an inattention to the ſpirituality of religion; a very imperfect knowledge of the œconomy of our redemption, and confuſed ideas of the terms of our acceptance with God. In too many, under a profeſſion of greater illumination, and more evangelical principles, an intemperate zeal for opinions; bitterneſs againſt thoſe who differ from them; a turning aſide from practical piety to vain janglings; a laying ſuch a ſtreſs upon non-eſſential doctrines, as to treat with enmity and contempt, thoſe with whom they confeſſedly agree in eſſentials; thus ſacrificing to ſome ſpeculative points, the love of God and their neighbour; and in the abundance of knowledge, not knowing what manner of ſpirit they are of; a

fondneſs for novelty, and a wantonly infringing thoſe rules of divine worſhip, handed down to us from our forefathers, under the ſeal of public authority; as if the Goſpel could not be preached, or with its due effect upon the mind, without ſome irregularity either in the manner, the place, and time of delivery, or in the preacher. God, my brethren, is the God of order, and not of confuſion. "Mark them," ſaith the Apoſtle, "that cauſe diviſions among you:" order is the baſis of ſociety, and the bleſſings its conveys, whether civil or ſacred. A mind given to innovation, but undermines the ſtructure it pretends to ſtrengthen and adorn.

Are we then actuated by a real deſire of our country's welfare? Would you ſee her flouriſh unimpaired, if not advancing in ſtrength and dignity? Are you anxious for her ſafety, amid the evils which ſurround her? You ſee your calling, brethren; remove the accurſed thing. It is ſin which is the cauſe of calamity. Let this be renounced. It is no matter how powerful

our

our allies, or how able our governors, while ſin hath dominion over us. We can obſerve this meaſure to be impolitic, and that man to be culpable, but who permits them ſo to be? He who never wants a ſcourge for a rebellious people, but who will ſuffer none to harm the followers of that which is good. He who controuls all things, even the unruly wills and affections of ſinful men. Look then deeper than to ſecond cauſes, in public diſaſters. Make heaven your ally; its ſovereign your friend. His hand is not ſhortened that it cannot ſave, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear.

Uſe your endeavours and your influence to repreſs iniquity at large, but more eſpecially your own. Think not of public reformation, till you have begun at home. National piety muſt reſult from that of individuals. Nor can you be certain of ſucceſs any where but in your own breaſt. Here, if in earneſt, you cannot fail. Let the day be ſacred to ſelf-examination and penitential confeſſion. This will be ſtriking at the root of public evils. Let each

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one reflect how far he has contributed to encreaſe them; and while his indignation riſes high againſt the character of a traitor to his country, let conſcience tell him, thou art the man. Thy prophaneneſs, intemperance or lewdneſs, thy formality or apoſtacy from the ways of God, thy inordinate love of the world, have contributed to form that cloud of guilt which intervenes between us and the light of God's countenance.

It concerns us to ſee this, with a view not only to the public welfare, but to our own: not only as members of civil ſociety, but as haſtening to another, an eternal ſtate; in compariſon of which the weightier circumſtances of this life are lighter than vanity; a ſtate of bliſs or woe unſpeakable. It will afford little conſolation to a man, at the hour of death or of judgment, that the tears and prayers of others have prevailed to ſave themſelves and their country, when having perſiſted in a courſe of rebellion againſt God, he is about to have

have *his* portion with the workers of iniquity.

On the other hand, ſhould your contrition not avail in a public view, it is a bleſſing that will moſt amply return into your own boſom. Though the earth be moved with civil commotions, yet need you not fear. You ſhall glorify God in the midſt of the fires of war and diſcord. Be it your endeavour to remain blameleſs and harmleſs, the ſons of God, amidſt a crooked and perverſe generation; to follow after peace and holineſs; ſee that you can upon ſcriptural grounds, plead the merits of the Lamb of God, as ſacrificed for us, and the deſtroying Angel ſhall paſs over you. When the divine commiſſion is given in Ezekiel's viſion, to ſmite the degenerate inhabitants of Jeruſalem, it is added, " but firſt go through the city, and ſet " a mark upon the foreheads of the men " that ſigh, and cry, for all the abomina- " tions that are done in the midſt thereof." Similar to which is that injunction to the miniſters of vengeance in the Revelation of

of St. John, "Hurt not the earth, neither "the ſea, nor the trees, till we have ſealed "the ſervants of God;" noting the divine care over the faithful, amidſt the moſt general and deſtructive calamities. But what is of much more importance, if you are of that deſcription, when all nature is in convulſions, and all faces among the wicked gather blackneſs, you ſhall lift up your heads with joy.

And let the bleſſings already experienced excite you to ſhew pity on others; to embrace the preſent opportunity of dealing your bread to the hungry, and covering the naked; of undoing the heavy burthens with which in times of public difficulties the poor are peculiarly oppreſſed. If they are matter of complaint where none of the comforts of life are wanting, what muſt be their preſſure, where poverty, and perhaps ſickneſs, add their weight. Faſting and alms-giving are twin duties; both ariſe, when genuine, from the ſame ſource, a ſpirit of humiliation. By the one we declare ourſelves unworthy of our good things,

and

and by the other, return them in part to their divine author, by the hands of the needy; and both, when performed in faith, aſcend up for a memorial before him, acceptable through Jeſus Chriſt. To whom be all honour aſcribed, &c.

FINIS.